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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [FI](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: FINLAND TO STRONGLY URGE SYRIA TO RESPECT LEBANON
ARMS EMBARGO

REF: STATE 136196

Classified By: PolChief Gregory Thome, Reasons 1.5 (b and d).

¶1. (C) Summary: DCM and PolChief met with MFA Political Director Vierros-Villeneuve Aug. 22 to express US disappointment regarding the Aug. 23 visit of Syrian FM Walid Al-Moallem to Helsinki; to remind the GOF of the need to isolate Syria diplomatically; and to urge that the Finns use the meeting to insist that Syria honor the arms embargo in Lebanon. Vierros-Villeneuve assured us that the Finnish EU Presidency intends to use the meeting to deliver a very tough message demanding that Syria honor the embargo and to press Damascus to "re-think its behavior" in Lebanon. Referring to our talking points (reftel), she said that "this US message is very much our message." She emphasized that the meeting in no way represents an upgrading or improving of EU-Syrian relations; is not to be considered a formal bilateral; and will take place in Finland because the GOF wants "to control the process, rather than letting it be controlled by Damascus." By way of background, at the August 1 GAERC the EU Foreign Ministers decided that Spain, Germany and the Finnish Presidency would make contact with the GOS to demand it play a constructive -- rather than "unhelpful" -- role in Lebanon. The Finns have consulted with the Israelis and sought their input for this meeting. They welcomed our input, and promised us a detailed read-out. End Summary.

"US Message is Our Message"

¶2. (C) DCM opened the meeting by expressing disappointment over the fact that Finland had agreed to host such a high level meeting with the Syrians. She reminded Vierros-Villeneuve that the US believes the international community needs to show unity in isolating the GOS in response to its unhelpful role in Lebanon and elsewhere in the region. However, since the meeting was to go forward, the DCM urged the GOF to use the opportunity to demand that Syria, as a UN member, respect the arms embargo on Lebanon and honor the other provisions of UNSC Resolution 1701. Allowing the Lebanese Government to assert sovereignty and to regain control over its territory is key to an enduring peace in the region, DCM concluded, and the Syrian Government must be put on notice that the international community expects it to allow that process to go forward.

¶3. (C) Vierros-Villeneuve responded by thanking the US for its interest and by assuring us that the GOF had every intention of using the meeting to deliver tough messages to the Syrians -- both on the arms embargo and on the generally troubling role it has played in Lebanon and the region. In that regard, the GOF intends to tell Al-Moallem that Syria needs to "re-think its behavior" and "behave in a more constructive way." Referring to the US talking points, she

said specifically that "this US message is very much our message." FM Tuomioja has even consulted with Israeli FM Livni to solicit her input for the meeting, Vierros-Villeneuve said.

Not a Formal Invitation

14. (C) Vierros-Villeneuve went on to stress that Al-Moallem's visit to Helsinki did not represent a formal bilateral meeting, nor did it represent a formal EU Presidency invitation. The ministers will reach no joint conclusions, there will be no joint press conference following the meeting, and the Finns do not intend to facilitate press availability for Al-Moallem. Rather, discussions will occur entirely behind closed doors, with Tuomioja issuing his own press statement afterward. The GOF will then provide a detailed report to the other EU member states.

(Vierros-Villeneuve promised to give us a detailed read-out as well.) She added that Tuomioja will make clear to the Syrian that this does not represent "an upgrading" or a step toward improving the EU-Syria relationship; on the contrary, the EU remains very concerned about Syria's actions.

15. (C) By way of background, Vierros-Villeneuve explained that the Member States' foreign ministers had agreed at the extraordinary Aug. 1 GAERC meetings that the EU needed to deliver a tough, direct message to Syria regarding the unhelpful role it was playing in the region. It was decided that Spain, Germany, and the Finnish EU Presidency -- along with High Rep Javier Solana -- would initiate the contact. Unhelpful public comments from Syria kept the German FM from visiting Damascus earlier, Vierros-Villeneuve explained, and Solana has not yet acted, partly out of deference to France, which apparently is adamantly opposed to direct contacts with Syria. Now, however, all member states were in agreement

that the Presidency needed to deliver a message to Syria as part of its effort to support 1701. Regarding the venue, Vierros-Villeneuve added, EU leaders quickly ruled out Brussels, to avoid the appearance of an EU-Syria high level meeting; for his part FM Tuomioja insisted that the meeting not take place in Syria, so that the Finns could "control the process, rather than letting it be controlled by Damascus."

Comment

16. (C) Most EU member states, including Finland, do not share the US view that diplomatic isolation is the best means of dealing with Syria. That said, Vierros-Villeneuve clearly understood our concerns, and was adamant that the US and the EU are on the same page in terms of message -- if not tactics. We are relatively confident that the Finns do intend to try to turn this potential negative into a positive by talking tough to the Syrian; however, given recent performances, we are less sanguine that FM Tuomioja will manage the media coverage as skillfully as Vierros-Villeneuve assured us he would. We will follow up with a read-out after the Aug. 23 meeting.

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